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ABSTRACT

Higher education's priorities during the next decade for the improvement of secondary and higher vocational education programs were identified. The Delphi technique analyzed a national sample of six vocational education leaders. The respondents, former American Vocational Association presidents, identified 38 priorities higher education should set to improve vocational education. The participants reached a strong degree of consensus on 11 statements, which fell into 2 categories: instruction and administration. Five statements fell into the instructional category: (1) incorporate modern technology; (2) stress lifelong learning; (3) emphasize students rather than programs; (4) expand career education programs; and (5) develop quality standards for all vocational classes. Six statements fell into the administration category: (1) develop a more positive view of vocational education; (2) require professional development; (3) emphasize collaboration; (4) encourage flexible vocational curriculum; (5) increase business and industry support; and (6) reduce vocational education myths. Higher education must take an active role in supporting vocational education through public relations, research and instructional delivery. A renewed commitment must be made to vocational education, calling for the integration of past tendencies and commitment with current issues and trends. (12 references) (NLA)

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Developing the Higher and Vocational Education Partnership: Priorities for the Next Decade

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Abstract

Higher education has historically played a vital role in the development and growth of vocational education as an academic discipline. With new federal directives, the role of higher education in vocational education has changed. Through a sample of vocational education leaders, 38 priorities for higher education's role in vocational education development were identified, with strong consensus on higher education's responsibility to vocational education being reached on 11 items, such as incorporating modern technology, professional development opportunities, and increasing business and industry interaction with education.

Few will question the forecast that the next ten years will be replete with challenges for higher education institutions. Questions arising from finance, ethics, research, mission and scope, student affairs, organizational structure, and programmatic planning, execution, and delivery may all share in the focus of controversy.

Vocational education's role in this changing world of higher education, spurred largely by reaction to and the guidelines spelled out in Perkins II, is uncertain (Anderson-Yates & Washburn, 1990). Trends in colleges of education and teacher preparation programs have been to concentrate on academic, rather than applied curricula (Parnell, 1990). However, higher education is perceived to have several responsibilities and obligations to the field of vocational education; a belief that has been reinforced by factors both within and external to higher education institutions (Calhoun & Finch, 1976).

In light of these challenges and changes, this study was conducted to identify and understand priorities higher education should have during the next decade for the improvement of secondary and higher vocational education programs.

Framework of the Study

Vocational education has arisen from decades of evolution to a place of national prominence, despite what some have termed "prestige deficiency" (Parnell, 1990, p. 302). Vocational and

technical education have played the fundamental role of providing practical education to students, preparing individuals for a variety of roles within the existing workforce, a traditional concept for the whole of higher education (Levine & Boyer, 1981; Levine, 1980).

Attention has shifted from formal education institutions to private business ownership of technical and skill training (Lillard & Tan, 1986). Additionally, the 1990 Perkins legislation placed primary emphasis and opportunities for vocational and technical education on secondary and postsecondary schools. The results of these two movements has been the isolation of vocational programming in higher education, reverting to providing teacher education opportunities in career education; an area of growing concern within many colleges of education (Palmer, 1985).

The dynamism of higher education, institutions often perceived as world leaders (Naisbitt & Aburdene, 1990), provides both local and national mandates for continued involvement in vocational education. With reduced federal funds and less fiscal attention by many state legislatures, the previously familiar role of higher education in offering vocational and technical education programs will be forced to change as never before. Higher education's new role in vocational education will shift to one of support, sponsoring, and supplementing programs in other sectors of education. This new role may take any number of forms, such as encouraging and facilitating business and industry

linkages with educational institutions, a role in which community colleges have historically shown leadership (Brand, 1990).

The uncertainty concerning the new role for higher education in vocational education served as the impetus for the design and implementation of this study.

Procedures

With the shortage of research-based techniques relevant to higher education's effort for aiding vocational education, the Delphi technique was employed. The Delphi technique provides for the solicitation and consensus building of expert opinion through a set of sequential questionnaires (Borg & Gall, 1988; Sackman, 1975; Van de Ven, & Delbecq, 1974).

The sample was drawn from national vocational education leaders. For this study, the five former and one current national president of the American Vocational Association (AVA) were perceived to be leaders in vocational education.

Of the six study participants, four were from the mid-west and two resided in the east. None of the respondents, however, indicated a geographic bias. After holding a position of national prominence with AVA, the participants were assumed to have approached the data collection instrument with a national or international consideration.

Results

Four of the six study participants completed all three rounds of the Delphi procedure, while two participants completed only the final two stages of the technique. The two participants who completed only the second and third round were provided the opportunity to add additional priorities, but declined to do so, representing a 100% return rate for the instrument.

The former presidents of AVA identified 38 priorities higher education should have to improve vocational education. The participants reached a strong degree of consensus on 11 statements, giving each technique a mean rating 4.6 or greater. Two statements earned ratings of 5. **(INSERT TABLE ONE HERE)**

Respondents altered their original rating of a statement on 12 occasions. Due to the high rating of all 38 statements, with an average rating of 4.2, only the statements with a mean of 4.6 or higher were utilized in the data analysis. This adjustment to the Delphi technique has been previously used to reach consensus and differentiate between highly rated statements. The analysis included 11 statements with a final mean rating of 4.6 or greater.

INSERT TABLE TWO HERE

Findings

The 11 statements used in the final tabulation fell into two distinct categories: instruction and administration.

Instruction: Five of the 11 statements achieving a mean ranking of 4.6 or greater related to instruction, ranging from curricular changes to general statements concerning teaching.

Respondents indicated that curriculum needs to be updated to reflect current trends and issues present in the realm of education. Participants voiced the concern that higher education should take a leadership role in curriculum based changes to advance vocational education. Statements included: "stress the importance of life-long learning," "work to incorporate modern technology," and "expand career education programs."

The former AVA presidents also contended that higher education needs to continue it's role as the generalist, concerned with the techniques of how education is offered. This was evidenced in two statements: "emphasize students rather than programs," and "develop quality standards for vocational education classes at all levels." Through these statements, participants voiced, with strong consensus (4.6 mean rating for each), that higher education should continue to be an advocate of quality instruction.

Administration: Respondents developed and reached consensus on 6 statements related to administrative procedures in higher education which could improve vocational programs.

Two statements dealt with increasing the resources available

to vocational education in the form of collaboration: "emphasize the necessity of collaboration between all elements of the education system," and "work to increase the support of vocational education by private business and industry." These statements were augmented by the necessity to update and alter basic curriculum guidelines. Respondents reached a 4.6 level of agreement on "encourage a more flexible vocational curriculum that better meets labor force needs."

Administrative actions also called for the improvement of the image of vocational education ("work to develop a more positive view of vocational education by the American public" and "within higher education, work to reduce the 'vocational education myths'") and a "systematic professional development program for vocational education."

Conclusions

The future of vocational education lies in the hands of many publics: colleges and university leaders, high schools administrators and teachers, and even in the hands of federal legislators. These publics were assumed to play a major role in defining and redefining the next decade for vocational education.

National vocational education leaders outlined a number of priorities for higher education which could improve the future of vocational education. Leaders identified 38 considerations for higher education's role in improving vocational education during the next ten years, primarily focusing attention on instruction

and administrative actions. Particular statements which achieved a high level of agreement included such items as: (a) work to incorporate appropriate modern technology; (b) increase the support of vocational education by private business and industry; and (c) within higher education, work to reduce the 'vocational education myths.'

These statements and the thematic areas represented by the constellation of priorities identified indicated that higher education does have a responsibility to vocational education programs in all levels of formal education. These responsibilities focused on the development of programs in secondary education, including personnel development (both pre- and in-service offerings), curriculum development, secondary program assistance in evaluation and assessment, and business and industry linkages. This responsibility exists to varying degrees in nearly all forms of vocational training, especially higher education's responsibility for the future of the discipline of vocational education.

According to respondents, higher education must take an active role in supporting vocational education through public relations, research, and instructional delivery. None of these areas have been blatantly resisted or neglected by previous generations of academic administrators, but a renewed commitment must be made to the concept of vocational education. The responses, while contemporary in nature and syntax, appeared reflective of an earlier generation of higher education teachers

and researchers: a generation of more generous funding, greater enthusiasm, and a unique place in the college of education. Findings indicated, however, that more than turning back the clock must be done to assure a future place for vocational education in the higher education setting. Responses, both individual and as a group, called for the integration of past tendencies and commitments with current issues and trends.

Table 1.

Priorities for Higher Education in
Improving Vocational Education

Priority	Mean Rating
Develop a more positive view of vocational education	5.0
Incorporate modern technology	5.0
Stress the importance of life-long learning	4.67
Require professional development	4.67
Emphasize students rather than programs	4.6
Emphasize collaboration	4.6
Encourage flexible vocational curriculum	4.6
Expand career education programs	4.6
Increase business and industry support of education	4.6
Reduce 'vocational education myths'	4.6
Develop quality standards for vocational classes at all levels	4.6

Table 2.
Limited Consensus Priorities for Higher Education
in Improving Vocational Education

Priority	Mean Rating
Work to develop more qualified teachers who understand the needs of agriculture education	4.5
Develop quality standards for vocational education programs and degrees	4.5
Share innovations in vocational instruction techniques in areas other than scholarly publications	4.5
Identify vocational leadership skills	3.8
Increase visibility of vocational teacher education possibilities	4.5
Implement leadership development through vocational student organizations	4.4
Use resources more efficiently	4.3
Work to retain 'top rate' vocational teacher educators	4.3
Develop understanding of the diversity of agriculture education	4.3
Shift attention to exit standards	4.3
Act as leaders in developing a dialogue between vocational administrators at all levels	4.3
Include more engineering subjects	4.2
Set criteria for acceptance of work experience for credit toward associate degree	4.1
Provide more opportunities for interaction between higher and secondary vocational administrators	4.1
Share financial management strategies	4.1
Develop standard curriculum with performance standards in program areas	4
Allow for more knowledge sharing in fiscal accountability techniques	4
Integrate vocational education with other disciplines	3.8
Create more joint programs with extension and continuing education agencies	3.8
Create joint programs with extension, agriculture and other courses that provide for a better understanding of agriculture in society	3.8
Develop standards for basic communication skills for associate degrees	3.8
Attract more 'top rate' teacher education candidates	3.6
Develop curriculum for agriculture literacy	3.6
Allow secondary vocational educators to take leadership in vocational research	3.6
Encourage more stringent vocational curriculum	3.1
Expand adult education course offerings	3.1
Work to change the Perkins II funding formula	2.8

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